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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: THE SICHUAN EARTHQUAKE IN CHINA; BURMA

¶1. Summary: Taiwan's major Chinese-language dailies focused news coverage May 14 on the rescue efforts in the Sichuan earthquake in China. In terms of editorials and commentaries, an editorial in the pro-unification "United Daily News" tried to shed lights on the "rise of China" from the Chinese government's response to various incidents, including the Tibetan uprising and the Sichuan earthquake. An op-ed in the centrist, KMT-leaning "China Times" commented that the manner in which China manages the Sichuan earthquake affects how its global image will be shaped and how cross-Straits relations will develop in the future. A column in the mass-circulation "Apple Daily" criticized the Burmese government's ruthlessness and speculated on the possibility of "regime change" with the delivery of humanitarian aid from the United States military. End summary.

## ¶2. The Sichuan Earthquake

### A) "A Natural Disaster Challenges the Chinese Communists' Capability and Confidence"

Chen Hsin-chih, Associate Professor in the Department of Political Science at Taiwan's National Cheng Kung University, opined in the centrist, KMT-leaning "China Times" [circulation: 400,000] (5/14):

"Mainland China has suffered major natural disasters within a short period of time, including the snowstorm in central China at the beginning of this year and the current earthquake in Wenchuan county of Sichuan Province. The Beijing Olympics, which starts its countdown soon, will also face challenges that affect national dignity. However, judging from appearances so far, unexpected natural disasters do not impede the Mainland China's normalization of relations with neighboring countries. The Mainland China authorities' transparency, being swift in releasing the news, is also fresh and new to people and demonstrates its image of being a big country with confidence. The way [in which China] handles [the Sichuan earthquake] is not the same way in which [China] handled the Tangshan Earthquake [in 1976] 32 years ago. A China that is confident and consolidating its strength will bring new opportunities and challenges to cross-Straits relations. ...

"Mainland China still faces a bottleneck in that its infrastructure is not sufficient and its integral quality needs to be improved. For a long time, even though it is going to pompously hold the Beijing Olympic Games in the near future, the Chinese Communists from time to time face unexpected and challenging natural disasters. If Mainland China works through a series of internal and external challenges, a Chinese Communists regime with capability and high confidence will be a respectable opponent in cross-Straits negotiations in the future. Let us prepare well and wait and see."

### B) "Talk About the Rise of China From the Sichuan Earthquake"

The pro-unification "United Daily News" [circulation: 400,000] editorialized (5/14):

"... [China] blocked all information on the conditions during the Tangshan Earthquake [in 1976] and only released the official estimate of the death toll, amounting to 240,000, three years later. Comparing with the previous time, it is definitely totally different that [China] shows the condition of the [Sichuan earthquake] on TV and releases estimates of casualties from time to time. From [way in which China] blocked news of the Tangshan Earthquake to the open handling of the Sichuan earthquake reveals China's change.

"The Tibetan incident [in March] is relatively thorny to the Beijing regime. The casualties of an earthquake can be revealed by statistical numbers. The rift in the Tibetan society cannot be measured, however. ... If China's open release of information on the [Sichuan] earthquake is regarded as [China's] willingness to receive internal and external comments, however, [China's] inability to explain the incidents in Tibet from the beginning to the end demonstrates that [China] has not found a resolution that is convincing both inside and outside [China]. The information control during the incident in Tibet is like the management of the Tangshan Earthquake. Making information on the Sichuan earthquake public demonstrates that the response of [China's] civil society and the [Chinese] government to contingencies have reached certain standards. Based on these, on the road to 'the rise of China,' various political shackles that the Chinese Communist regime has imposed on its government and civilians will have to be liberated, one after the other, in the future. ..."

### 13. Burma

"Burma Might Face Regime Change"

Tu Nien-chung wrote in his weekly column in the mass-circulation "Apple Daily" [circulation: 520,000] (5/14):

"... United States Pacific Commander Admiral Timothy Keating has arrived in Rangoon with the first [United States] Air Force transport aircraft. Keating's purpose is definitely not limited to [providing] aid [to the Burmese victims in Cyclone Nargis]. He will negotiate with the [Burmese] junta on how to expand the role of the United States military in [humanitarian] relief in Burma. The United States has an embassy in Burma and is able to negotiate with the Burmese government on aid. This time, the large force of the United States threatens the [Burmese] border and the Commander [Admiral Keating] visits in person. Although in the name of relief, it is in fact tantamount to the gunboat diplomacy, which is extremely out of the ordinary.

"The disaster of the cyclone reveals the Burmese junta's incompetence and the way it treats civilians as mere pawns. There are 100,000 deaths and two million people destitute and homeless. Also, with the breakout of diseases and the soaring of commodity prices, the internal and external contradictions in Burma will likely become an upheaval. If an external force receives coordination within the country, it is afraid that the junta will be kept constantly on the run and fail to cope in the end. The possibility of regime change in Burma surfaces as well."

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